

GRAPHIC ARTIST RAYMOND PETTIBON ILLUSTRATES OUR ERA, FROM PUNK TO POLITICS

Dawn-Michelle Baude Thu. Oct. 5, 2017 (12:00am)



Political cartoonist? Not really. Comic book artist? Nope. Graphic novelist? Nu-uh. Raymond Pettibon, the pre-eminent image/word artist of our time, takes graphic art to a new, elusive plane. It's not even "graphic art" anymore. It's *art*.

The evidence is in *Raymond Pettibon*, an exhibition now at MCQ Fine Art. The show spans more than three decades, from Pettibon's obscure roots in punk-rock fanzines from the 1980s to the millennial artist of international stature spotlighted in retrospectives at the New Museum in New York City and the Museum of Contemporary Art in LA. The ink drawings, lithographs, screenprints, zines, albums and book

aren't meant to simply entertain, although wit and more wit is a hallmark of Pettibon's style. In fact, Pettibon's art is meant to be contemplated.

Like movie stills, Pettibon's images suggest larger narratives to which they belong, while the texts often seem to be voiceovers from unidentified speakers rather than speech bubbles. Between the image and the text, a gap opens where imagination roves, inspiring multiple interpretations. Although the works might appear to be dashed off, they're actually the product of countless iterations, sometimes over decades.

Some of Pettibon's favorite motifs are sampled in the MCQ show. For example, in the lithograph "Untitled" (2000) the artist depicts, in a style influenced by Goya, a mushroom cloud accompanied by the words, "How comes it so great a silence has fallen?" The muscularity of the iconic cloud—it seems a solid, tree-like mass—conflicts with the archaic English of the Robert Louis Stevenson quote, so that historic frames collide in a protest against war in any era.

Another ink drawing, "If I Had a Husband, I'd Divorce Him" (1983), pokes fun at the stock characters in the noir film genre, while the lithograph "Untitled" (2002) presents an affable self-portrait (a favorite Pettibon theme). The latter strikes an introspective note with the caption, "I See Before Me Words You Should Not Have Written," so that the viewer is left to wonder whose words the artist had in mind.

Pettibon's more confrontational images of, say, torture at the Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, are omitted from the exhibition, along with his mordant political messaging. That said, this mini-survey is a vivid reminder of Pettibon's achievement. It's not to be missed.

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Raymond Pettibon on view through November 3, Monday–Friday, 9am–5pm

MCQ Fine Art Advisory, 620 South 7th Street, 702-366-9339